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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BANJUL 000761

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DAKAR PLS PASS DAO, ODC, AND RAO

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KMCA](#) [GA](#) [IR](#) [SG](#)

SUBJECT: THE GAMBIA: PRESIDENT JAMMEH'S INAUGURATION

REF: A. BANJUL 589 ET AL

[1](#)B. BANJUL 708

[1](#)C. BANJUL 744 (ALL NOTAL)

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Classified By: AMBASSADOR JOSEPH STAFFORD, REASON 1.4 (B AND D)

SUMMARY

[1](#)1. (C) The December 15 inauguration of President Jammeh's third term featured pomp and ceremony, and the bombastic leader used the occasion to portray The Gambia as a future "economic superpower," while also requesting Gambians' "forgiveness." Four African heads of state (Nigeria, Togo, Mauritania, and Ethiopia) attended; we were told that Senegalese President Wade was absent due to strains over the Casamance dossier. The Iranian Vice President's presence highlighted the expanding Iranian/Gambian ties in recent months. END SUMMARY.

POMP AND CEREMONY

[1](#)2. (U) Following Yahya Jammeh's re-election as President for a third term in September (ref a), his inauguration was held December 15. The GOTG and ruling APRC party labored mightily to create a joyous atmosphere in Banjul for the event, organizing, in addition to the swearing-in ceremony, a large state dinner, military parade, and several musical concerts during the December 14-17 period. A three-day official holiday period was proclaimed.

JAMMEH'S SPEECH

[1](#)3. (SBU) Jammeh delivered a relatively brief speech on taking the oath of office, urging Gambians, "irrespective of tribe, religion, origin, or region" to work together for the country's development. Displaying his penchant for bombast and citing the experience of Singapore, he spoke of The Gambia (among the world's smallest and poorest countries) becoming an "economic superpower that will stand shoulder to shoulder with the world's major economic powers." In a possible reference to GOTG/APRC's excesses during the September election and to authorities' abuses in response to the abortive coup plot in March, he told the audience, "I forgive all of you and expect all of you to forgive me."

FOREIGN ATTENDEES AND NO-SHOWS

¶4. (C) On hand for the inaugural ceremony were heads of state from Nigeria, Togo, Mauritania, and Ethiopia, along with various African and other Vice Presidents, Prime Ministers, including, inter alia, Iran's Vice President and Taiwan's Prime Minister. Conspicuous by his absence was Senegal's President Wade; the Senegalese Ambassador here had previously told us that Wade would attend (ref b). A reliable journalistic source attributed Wade's absence to strains over the Casamance issue, saying the Senegalese leader remained skeptical of Jammeh's assurances that he was not providing sanctuary to, or otherwise assisting dissident Casamance rebel figure Salif Sadio and his supporters. (COMMENT: Our source was also skeptical that Jammeh had halted his cooperation with Sadio; we have no independent information, but regard as eminently plausible the possibility of ongoing meddling by Jammeh in the Casamance. END COMMENT)

¶5. (C) The foreign visitor attracting the most attention was Nigerian President Obasanjo, who had not been expected to attend and who, arriving shortly before the ceremony's opening around noon on December 15, departed immediately after the 90-minute event. Our journalistic source said that Obasanjo had made an appearance only because Jammeh had essentially begged him to do so and that the two leaders had had no opportunity for a side meeting. Our source added that Jammeh, having invited all African leaders to his inauguration, had been disappointed that only four had ended up personally attending.

COMMENT

¶6. (C) The widely expected major policy speech by Jammeh at his inauguration failed to materialize, and the reasons for

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the volatile leader's relatively subdued performance are not clear. Despite the GOTG/APRC effort to whip up an enthusiastic, joyous mood among the citizenry, our sense is that the large majority of attendees at inaugural events were GOTG officials and APRC cadres. Judging from our soundings among Gambian contacts, a ho-hum attitude prevailed among much of the public. It remains to be seen whether Jammeh's request for "forgiveness" will translate into an easing of his increasingly autocratic governance in past months. The Iranian Vice President's appearance, following Jammeh's recent trip to Tehran (ref c), highlighted the expanding Iranian/Gambian ties in recent months. END COMMENT.
STAFFORD